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FAITH and CHARACTER
OF THE FIRST
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES,
ILLUSTRATED,

IN A

S E R M O N

DELIVERED

At the BAPTISM of three CHILDREN,
JULY the 7th, 1769.



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WHEN we think of the *Gospel of God*, it brings to mind his sincerity in the prophecies and promises of the Old-Testament Scriptures, which we see fulfilled in Jesus. And it may be said, that those who believe the Gospel, must have their Faith followed with *Godly sincerity*, to make them confess with their Mouths, what they believe in their Hearts, both with respect to the leading concern of the Gospel, *acceptance with God*, and to every other thing connected with it.

Now here are a very few of us here, who have, much against our natural inclinations, been brought to conclude in our Hearts, that the different sorts of Christian Professors, from the great, the material Church of Rome, and thro' all national Churches to the meanest Churches of Protestant Dissenters, through every Christian Country, form one great body of People, which in the Apostle's writings get the name of the *Man of Sin*, who has come out of that Profession of Christianity, which the Apostle's left in the World, by means of that *falling away* which they foretold ^a.

This vast body is called a *Man*, even as the true followers of the Lamb that was slain, with those that from the beginning of the world received

^a 2 Thes. ii. 3.

the promise of him, have the same name, *a Man*^b, and are represented by the *body* of a Man, of which Jesus Christ is the head. And as the true Church, or body of Christ, is represented by a *Woman*^c, even so, in like manner, are the before-mentioned professors of Christianity, called a *Woman*, or set forth under that figure; but an unclean Woman, a Whore^d, pretending to be the Spouse of Christ, and to receive him for her Lord, but committing Fornication with Kings of the Earth, or otherwise taking another Lord, and being disaffected to him in faith and obedience. And as we have such an opinion of the Christian World, it cannot be inconsistent with that *Godly sincerity*, which comes as the effect of believing the Gospel, to confess it.

This great apostate Church, which the Apostles foretold, has come, according to their Word, and, according to their Prophecy, has come to the appointed height, dominion and power set for her in the providence of him, who is even head over all things to his true Church. And whereas the Apostles said, The *Man* of Sin should fall into a *Consumption*^e before his final *Destruction*, and as a token of the destruction approaching; even so that consumption has likewise come. The Kings of the Earth have been fulfilling their Work of making this apostate Church desolate and naked. Her constitution is ruined: her body broken into numerous different denominations, like a Kingdom or House divided against itself. And the different builders of all the denominations in this great house have got their Lip confounded^f, that they

^b Eph. ii. 15, and Chap. iv. 4, 13, 15, 16. ^c Rev. xii. 1.
^d Rev. xvii. 1—7. ^e 2 Thes. ii. 8. ^f Gen. xi. 7.

can proceed no further in building — The *uniformity* once so strong, can never more in that shape be restored, or succeed the *dispersion* ^s that God in his providence has brought to pass.

And the fifth Angel poured out his Vial upon the seat of the beast ; and his Kingdom was full of darkness.

May the mighty God encrease the darkness, confusion and distress thro' every part of the Kingdom of the Beast. By this wish, it may be known how we stand affected to the different denominations of the Christian World.

When the Lord Jesus shall come the second Time without Sin to the Salvation of the very few that will be looking for him (and the Time is just at hand) he then comes to destroy this great corrupt Church, by the brightness of that coming ^h: Then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a Woman with Child ; and they shall not escape ⁱ. And it is some comfort to them who are looking for Christ, that, *They are not in darkness, that that Day should overtake them as a Thief* ^k.

But surely, before this destruction come, that great call of God Almighty will fetch all his People out of her communion into the Churches of his Saints, where there will be found Salvation : *Come out of her my People, that ye be not partakers of her Sins, and that ye receive not of her Plagues,* Rev. xviii. 4.

These Churches, where there shall be found Salvation, at this fearful time, fast approaching, must be something like the Churches that were

^s Gen. ii. 8. ^h 2 Thes. ii. 8. ⁱ 1 Thes. v. 3. ^k Ver. 4.

at the beginning. They must have the *Faith* once delivered to the Saints, connected with Salvation; and they must have the *commandments of God*. If we are then indeed concerned about our own Salvation, and concerned to escape the wrath to come, we shall be equally concerned about the Faith. And as Faith is believing God, how can we better illustrate it than by attending to the testimony which God has given of his Son? as we have it in the third chapter of the Gospel according to *Matthew*, and the 16th Verse.

And lo, a Voice from Heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

This is the testimony of the righteous Father, concerning Jesus of Nazareth; and it is from Heaven. These words form the Capital, the central saying of the Scriptures; to which every thing in them some way refers: and they shew an unity of design thro' the whole. Or it may be said, that, These few words collect the sense and grand import of all the Scripture, and set that import before us in one point of view. Indeed the wisdom and goodness of God appears very remarkable in frequently exhibiting compendiums of the *Faith*, setting before us the import of all the Scriptures in few words, that whosoever believes may thereby be saved. We may then say, Our eternal Salvation, or Destruction, will at last eventually turn on the conclusion our minds come to on these words of the Father concerning the Son. If we believe them as Jesus did, we shall be saved: If we take them up in a contrary light, or affix to them a false sense, we shall perish. Here we are brought to an awful stand, where there is no medium between *Faith* and *Infidelity*, with their consequent connections, Salvation and Damnation. So when Jesus gave his twelve Apostles this same Testimony, (which he called

called the Gospel) to report to all the world; he told them, that whosoever believed their report should be saved, and he that believed them not should be damned, *Mark xvi. 16.*

All Men are therefore nearly concerned in the great Truth which is here testified by the Father from Heaven. And I do not mean to insinuate, that there is any thing obscure, deep, or intricate in it: quite the reverse. But the minds of Men are blinded by a deceitful sense of *Worth*, in their own character, on one hand, and, on the other, by having the character of God, through the influence of this deception, placed before them in such a light as suits with their notion of dignity, righteousness or holiness in Men. Thus they (I speak of those esteemed the best men and the soundest Christians) form a God like themselves. And hence it is, that the *Imagination* (2 Cor. x. 5.) that we have *something*, at least, in our dispositions, or in our works, that God is *well pleased* with, is a thought we cannot part with, till, by the forceable conviction of the truth in our text, we are, against our will, furnished with a new discovery of the divine Character, which did not enter our Hearts before: A Character most awful, shewing us that the very things in us on account of which we valued ourselves, and took comfort before God, are the things that render us odious in his sight, and mark us out for destruction: and so, *that which is highly esteemed among Men, is abomination in the sight of God.* It is indeed natural for us to be averse to that which makes us miserable, that which demonstrates us desperately wicked where we thought to approve ourselves righteous; and removes from us all ground of glorying before God, where we thought we had sure standing.

But

But if the testimony of the righteous Father, respecting the Son come from heaven to manifest the divine character in his *life* and *death*, if this testimony, I say, shew us our wickedness and consequent danger of perdition, it, at the same time, brings us effectual relief, even in the broadest view of our ¹ guilt, by pointing us to the Son, a person of infinite dignity and worth, standing engaged to *fulfil all righteousness*, and receiving the divine approbation.

But before we consider this more particularly, let us first note a few things that may shew us in what an eminent and important light this truth stands in the New testament; even this truth that Jesus of Nazareth was certainly *the Son of God*.

1. Jesus was, by the power of the highest, in the womb of his mother, formed with a disposition suitable to believe this fact from the Old-Testament scriptures, and the revelation to his mother before his conception. The Holy Ghost opened his ears to hear the voice of God in divine revelation: and this is the scope of it all, *that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*. Accordingly we find him early professing the belief of this truth: when his mother said to him, *Thy Father and I have sought thee sorrowing*, he replied, *Wist ye not that I must be about my FATHER's business*. Here Jesus signified his belief of his being the Son of God, tho' he was not understood; but his mother kept the sayings in her heart. See Luke ii. 46—51.

¹ The preacher, speaking of our *guilt* and danger, has still directly in view, those good dispositions and works, on account of which, we secretly bless ourselves as more acceptable to God than the profane. Here our guilt appears in the broadest view.

When

2. When Jesus came to enter on his public ministry to the Jews, to whom he was to tell this truth he believed, we see him confirmed in his faith, from our text by this testimony of his Father, and, in the preceding verse by the descent of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost came upon him as the Spirit of patience to qualify him for maintaining this truth under all temptations and sorrows, and against all opposition unto death.

3. When Jesus had received this notable confirmation of his faith, that he was the *Son of God*, he was immediately led up from his baptism into the wilderness, that his faith might undergo the severest trial from the tempter, who, having indeed every advantage against him, levelled his temptations for this fatal purpose, to beget in him, if it might be, a doubt whether he was really the Son of God, as he had believed or not: *If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.—If thou be the Son of God, cast thy self down:—All these will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me*^r. Tho' Jesus was here placed in the most disadvantageous circumstances for withstanding the different temptations, yet he overcame by the *word of God* which he believed: *It is written again*. Satan found no place where his temptations could make the least impression.

4. When the faith of Jesus had sustained this great attack from the father of lies, it was from thenceforwards set directly, in open view, before his children, the Jews, who, with great zeal for the honour of God, opposed it, under many spacious pretences. The fact, that Jesus was the Son of God, was the great thing in dispute between him and the men of his nation in the greatest repute for piety,

^r Mat. iv. 1—11.

orthodoxy, and devotion to the service of God. See particularly *John*, chapters 5th, 8th and 10th. There was a process carried on upon this matter. Jesus maintained the truth he believed, from the testimony of *John* the baptist^s, the testimony of his Father in our text, the divine works which he wrought before them, and from the testimony of the Old-Testament Scriptures. See *John* v. 17, 18, 32, 40. This process issued in Christ's death. When the time of it's conclusion drew near, we find the High Priest, who presided in the great court where the question was determined against Jesus, proposing to him, for the last time, and in the most solemn manner, whether he proposed to abide by his pretension? *I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God?* Jesus confessed the truth. He owned himself *the Son of God*: And his confession brought on him the sentence of death. Says the High Priest, *What think ye? They answered, and said, He is guilty of death.* Mat. xxvi. 63, 66.

But Jesus held fast the truth in the view of dying for it. And in the extremity of his sufferings, when his God forsook him, and gave him the cup of mortal sorrow, (because of his people's sins) in that hour of darkness to his soul, he remained unshaken in the belief of the truth, saying, *O my Father!*^t and his soul expired in the stedfast belief of it; for thus he commended his departing soul to his Father: *FATHER into thy hands I commend my spirit.* Luke xxiii. 46.

The Jews, many of them, no doubt, thought when they saw Jesus dead, and no appearance of the Father's interposing to save him from death, nor

^s John i. 34. *And I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God.* ^t Mat. xxvi. 39—42.

any power in himself to prevent it ^u, that his pretension to be the Messiah, the Son of God, was, at last, detected, as a piece of imposture; which, in their zeal for the honour of God, they had brought to light, by thus pushing the trial of it to the last extremity. For we do not find that the awful tokens of God's displeasure in the miracles that accompanied his death, did soften their hearts towards that *truth* for which he died. It is indeed said of the people that came together to that sight, that they beholding the things that were done, *smote their breasts, and returned*: And the officer of the soldiers that attended his crucifixion, did really acknowledge the truth on which he laid down his life: He said, *Truly, this man was the Son of God*. But we find those who had condemned Jesus to death for confessing himself the Son of God, and had procured the sanction of the Roman governor for his death, ridiculing him on the cross, and after his death and burial, taking sure methods to prevent any report of his resurrection. *Mat. xxvii. 62—66.*

5. But there was not an end of this truth when Jesus was dead and buried. The sentence of the Jews was reversed, and the truth of his being the Son of God demonstrated in his resurrection. He was, says the Apostle, *DETERMINED the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.* *Rom. i. 4.*

Instead of extirpating this fact from the earth, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son God, as the Jews intended, by killing him, they were making way for the evidence of it to shine forth to the world; for, on the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven, to spread abroad the truth

^u For they said, when he was on the cross, in imitation of their Father, the devil, *If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.* *Mat. xxvii. 42, 43.*

in the everlasting gospel by the ministry of the Apostles. When he came he *testified of Jesus*, even as Jesus had before said he should do : and he convinced the Jews of their Sin of not believing him to be the Christ, the Son of God^a. We see that Peter's sermon, Acts, chap. ii. carried conviction to about three thousand, who had given consent to his death, that the same Jesus whom they had crucified was made both Lord and Christ — That he was indeed what he had acknowledged himself to be before their high priest, *The Christ, the Son of God*.

Yea, and the opposition made in Jerusalem to the Apostle's testimony, by the Holy Ghost, only served to spread it abroad ; for, *they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word* of his resurrection as the proof of his being the Son of God. This brought Philip to the city of Samaria, where he preached *Christ*, his being alive again, and the things concerning the *name of Jesus Christ*, which reminds us of his being the Son of God. On this belief the Samaritans were baptized, Acts viii. 5. 12. as the dwellers at Jerusalem had been before, Acts ii. 41.

6. To believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God as it stands confirmed by his resurrection, is the *faith* of the true church. From Samaria Philip was directed to the Eunuch of Ethiopia to whom he preached *Jesus*, even as he had before preached *Christ* at Samaria : He preached *Jesus* that he was the Son of God ; for thus the Eunuch's *confession* answers to Philip's *preaching* : *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of*^b *God*. This is the foundation of the New-Testament church, upon which it stands as on a *rock*. When Peter confessed his faith to

^a John xvi. 8. 9. ^b Acts viii. 37.

Jesus, he said, *Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God*: Jesus replies, *On this rock will I build my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.* Mat. xvi. 16—18. Agreeable to this, when Paul preached the *faith*, which once he destroyed ^a *he preached Christ in the Synagogues, that he is the Son of God.* Acts ix. 20.

7. As it was before noted, every one who believes this truth, as Jesus believed it, and as the Apostles believed it, viz. all who take up the import of the *fact* in the same light they did, have eternal life with them; *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten SON, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—He that believeth on the SON hath everlasting life.* John iii. 16. 36. Again, John tells us, that whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, *is born of God, and overcometh the world.* 1 John v. 1. 5. And the Lord told Peter, that to understand him to be the Son of God, laid beyond the line of flesh and blood: *Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* This truth then comes from heaven, even as the words of our text come from heaven: *And lo, a voice from heaven.* Hence the believers of this truth are said to be *born from above* or born again. And the apostle James, speaking of the Father, says, *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth*; even this same truth, that Jesus Christ is his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased. John acquaints us with the great design of writing his Gospel in this manner: *These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life thro' his name.*

^a Gal. i. 23.

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8. Finally, that this truth may live to the end of the world, for the salvation of every one who believes it, there are three bearing record to it in heaven, *the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost*.—And there are three bearing witness on earth, *The Spirit and the water and the blood*. And may we then consider, that this truth which we believe, and are saved, comes from God.—*This is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son*. He that believes has the witness in his conscience: *He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son*.

These things I have noted with a view to awaken attention to the great importance which this truth seems to claim. But whether this end shall be gained with respect to any of you, which I suppose curiosity has brought here, is a subject with which the preacher has no business.

Let us now attend more particularly to the import of this divine testimony from the Father, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*.

The first thing that strikes our mind on hearing the Father testify that the *man* Jesus is his *Son*, is, his being partner with the Father in the *divine nature*, and *equally* with the Father having every divine attribute and perfection peculiar to the *one God*: even as Jesus, being called the *Son of man* imports his being a partner with the seed of Abraham in their *nature*, or truly and properly *a man*. Those who believed Jesus to be the Son of God at the beginning, believed him to be *God*. Accordingly we find the disciples, on an instance of divine power he gave them, gave this reason for paying him divine worship: *Of a truth thou art the Son of God*, Mat. xiv. 23. And the man whose eyes Jesus opened, as soon as he understood him to be the Son of God, *he worshipped him*, and Jesus received the

the worship. Read John ix. 35—38. Nathanael also understood that omniscience belonged to him, when he cried out, *Thou art the Son of God*. John i. 48, 49.

But not Men only, but all the Angels worship that Person who is the *Son*, the *first begotten*, Heb. i. 6. The first Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews treats on the Person of the Son of God, and calls him *the brightness of the Father's Glory* and his *express Image*; he is also there said, to *uphold all things by the word of his Power*, to *lay the foundation of the Earth in the beginning*, and to *make the Heavens*, which he shall again *fold up as a vesture*; but he remains *unchangeably the same*, and his *Years never fail*. Yea he is, from the 45th Psalm, thus addressed, *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of Righteousness is the scepter of thy Kingdom*. And the 24th Psalm, which calls on the everlasting doors to move to this Person at taking the scepter of his Kingdom, asks this question, *Who is this King of Glory?* and returns this answer, *The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory*.

The Devils also fell down before him under this acknowledgment: *Thou art the Son of God*. Mark iii. 11.

And his Enemies, the Jews, who opposed him as a Blasphemer, in calling himself the Son of God, understood him to be thereby making himself God; and therefore they sought to kill him, not only because he had broken the Sabbath, but because he also said, *That God was his Father, making himself equal with God*. Jesus said in their hearing, *I and my Father are one*, on which they took up Stones to stone him, and said upon it, *For a good work we stone thee not; but for Blasphemy, and because that thou, being a Man makest THY SELF God*.

It

It was this made their High Priest rent his clothes, as a token of his hearing horrible Blasphemy, when he heard Jesus acknowledge himself the Son of God.

It may yet be noted further, that when the Messiah was promised, as the *Son given*, he was called *the mighty God*. Isa. ix. 6.

But if Christ's being the Son of God, imports his having the same *divine Nature* with the Father, and shews his true and proper *Godhead*; it also imports his being another *Person* than the Father, even as a Son is another Person than his own Father, and as the Son of God was sent of the Father into the World, and came forth from the Father,

His being the Son of God also leads us to think of him as the *Image of the invisible God*, the Father's likeness or *express Image*, and the *Way* to the Father, on whom we fix our minds when we pray to the Father in Heaven. See John xiv. 1.—11. and Chap. iv. 23, 24. with Heb. x. 19, 20. Col. i. 15.

The Father testifying to us that he is *well pleased* in his Son leads our minds directly to his *Office*, as the promised *Messiah* the Christ. This testimony of divine Approbation in Jesus of Nazareth refers to the Words he had spoken to John before his Baptism: *Thus it becometh us to fulfil all Righteousness.*

The law of God requires perfect obedience and connects that obedience with Life, or the favour of God: *The Man that doeth those things shall live in them.*——*This do and thou shalt live*; but, at the same time it curses every Transgressor: *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them.*

When

When this *Law* was given by Moses, the People to whom it was given, sent this answer to their God: *All that the Lord hath spoken will we do.* Exod. xix. 8. Upon which the Lord utters these words: *O that there were such an Heart in them, that they would keep all my Commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their Children for ever!* Deut. v. 29.

Now, is it possible we can think, that this Law was given never to be fulfilled; or that the People's words were sent to God never to be made good; or that this wish was uttered from the Mouth of the Lord never to be accomplished? Do we admit this thought in our heart?—GOD FORBID! And yet never one of these Things were fully accomplished in that *first Covenant*. We must then look for the accomplishment of all this in a new Covenant, of which the former stood as a Type. We must look for its accomplishment in the promised Messiah, the *Seed* to spring from the People of that Old Covenant.

And in him the whole is accomplished, even as in God's account, the Law was given, the obedience of the People promised, and the divine wish uttered, with a direct View to him, *Who is the end of the Law for Righteousness to every one that believeth.* And this is Jesus of Nazareth; who came to *fulfil all Righteousness*——to magnify the Law and make it honourable——to bring in an everlasting Righteousness: and the Lord IS WELL PLEASED for his Righteousness sake: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* So then, all the expressions of divine Approbation under the Old Covenant center here.

Those

Those who feared the name of their God in the Old Testament church, looked for one to come, to fulfil that broken law they were under, and to redeem them from its curse; and the ground of this expectation in them was the ground of all their comfort in life and death; and therefore they earnestly desired to see his day, and longed for *the salvation of Israel to come out of Zion*; one who should *work all their works for them*. But no such person appeared, till Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, whom one of these Old Testament Saints, who was waiting for him, took up in his arms, and *blessed God and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation*.—Now they found the *Messiah*, him of whom Moses, in the law, and the prophets, did write, *Jesus of Nazareth*.

When this same divine testimony came to Jesus Christ, at his transfiguration in the holy mount, he was conversing with Moses and Elias concerning *his disease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*. See Luke ix. 30, 31—35. And the *good pleasure* of the Father in Christ, respects his decease at Jerusalem, his death on the cross, where his righteousness was finished, and *reconciliation made for iniquity*. In Christ's death on the cross, the glory of the divine justice was fully manifested by the execution of the threatened curse against *all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*; and the glory of the divine mercy in the salvation of thousands of sinners. Christ redeemed his people, for whom he engaged to fulfil all righteousness, *from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them*. This was also prefigured in the sacrifices of Moses's law. The institution of these sacrifices was accompanied with this expression of divine satisfaction: *A sweet savour unto the Lord*.

Lev.

Lev. chap. i. Which was not expressed with respect to these sacrifices, of themselves alone, but as types of the *offering of the body of Jesus Christ*; for this was the sacrifice that came as the end of the law, *of a sweet smelling savour unto the Lord*, Eph. v. 2. and abolished the former, of which it was said, *in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou had no pleasure.* Then said I, lo, I come—to do thy will, O God. Heb. x. 6. 7. And his coming abolished the first covenant and established the second. Thus, *the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

The divine good pleasure then, expressed in our text, respects the work of Christ ALONE; even, that work by which he has manifested his *Father's name* (viz. his character) as JUST in the execution of the threatned curse to the fullest extent; and MERCIFUL to the thousands of the transgressors of his law,—JUST AND MERCIFUL IN PERFECTION. This is the true God; and it is life eternal to know him. To whomsoever the work of Christ, the substitute for the guilty, extends, the divine good pleasure follows it. In vain, then, shall any Sinner seek to *please* God by what he finds himself to be in distinction from the most ungodly, by any thing he works or any thing he feels; in vain shall any Sinner pray for grace to enable him to see or feel any thing about him to intitle him to the divine favour, and in vain shall he expect ever to hear ought else from God to give him comfort than the bare testimony in our text, that he is well pleased in his beloved Son.

Now, as the tidings, that Christ Jesus, the Son of God, has appeared, as the end of the law for righteousness, and has fulfilled all righteousness, in place of the ungodly of every nation, is the gospel; and stands proved by that great fact, his re-

urrection from the dead ; I acknowledge all I have been saying hitherto has only been to make way for this conclusion,

That the work of the Son of God, is of itself alone sufficient to justify before God, and save from wrath *the chief of Sinners* : And that the bare report which the apostles have made of his person and work, is, of itself alone, sufficient to *ease* the guilty conscience and give COMPLETE RELIEF to the vilest of mankind, as soon as ever that report is believed in the heart. The New testament every where supports this. For, besides the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, there is none other given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved.

No doubt it will be despised, or judged incredible, that what a person DID, who appeared in the world near 1800 years ago should be alone sufficient of itself, to justify us before God, just as we, at present, stand, without our *doing* or *feeling* any thing to make us differ from the vilest of men. But thus it was from the beginning : The same sort of contempt appeared when the apostles preached the gospel. See Isa. Chap. liii. Acts xiii. 38—47. And this must be the sure attendant of the gospel report to the end of the world ; for till then Christ rules by his word, the rod of his strength, *in the midst of his enemies*. The *truth* concerning the person and work of Jesus, must meet the same treatment, from the Christian World, that he met with himself from the Jews, when he told them the truth which he heard of God.

There is nothing ensnaring in the gospel to draw men to profess it. It assures all who profess it they must meet with tribulation in the world, and be conformed to Jesus in suffering, that they shall be def-

despised and hated of all sorts of people to the very end.

But very likely some may be inclined to say, "We believe, as much as any one can do, the representation that has been given of the person and work of the Son of God; but we do not find any satisfaction at all in believing these facts; we want to know our interest in Christ, and that what he has done, he did it for us. Have you nothing to offer for our satisfaction upon this head? For without this, any thing that can be said of Christ, is no gospel to us." My answer is briefly this: I have nothing further to say on this head, than that you cannot give a plainer demonstration of your being *unbelievers*; or whatever you believe concerning the work of Christ, that may be *true*, you believe it together with a *lie* that is connected with damnation. To talk of believing the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God, and not have *joy and peace in believing*; or, to have *faith* without being justified, is, in the view of the gospel, as great an absurdity as can be uttered.

But you may proceed forward, seeking comfort by what you find yourselves to be, in distinction from what you once were; or by what you *do*, *feel*, or *experience*, it matters not which: You may hereby strive to introduce yourselves to the benefit of Christ's work for sinners; and be you as devout, as orthodox, and as experimental as you may, all your labour, and its last issue, you have set before you in the words of your Maker. *Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.* Isa. l. 11.

When these words of our text were spoken at Christ's transfiguration, *This is my beloved son, in*

whom I am well pleased, The voice added, HEAR YE HIM.

Now, when the first gospel churches appeared, they appeared standing upon this Faith, as a house stands on its foundation: and the apostles taught these churches *to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded them*^a. What they delivered unto the Churches, were the things they received from the Lord^b.

The members of these churches were united together by the simple truth; for Christ was not only their foundation but the chief Corner-stone^c. That which commended them to one anothers hearts and affections was the truth they believed. They loved one another *for the truth's sake which dwelt in them*^d. The truth which they believed was their *bond of peace*; the hinge and center of their union.—And this faith separated them from all their former religious connections. See Acts ii. 40.

And every member, in one of these churches, appeared *like-minded* with the rest. They were *of one heart, and of one soul*^e, even as they were *one body*^f. It is true the church at Corinth had divisions; but the apostle spoke to them in a manner that shewed, evidently, his being greatly ALARMED: *Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*—*Is Christ divided?* And he shewed them, they could not eat the Lord's supper, till their unity was restored, without eating and drinking

^a Matt. xxviii. 20.
ii. 6. ⁱ Cor. iii. 11.
^f Eph. iv. 4.

^b 1 Cor. xi. 23.
^d 2 John i. 2.

^c 1 Pet.
^e Acts iv. 32.

judgment to themselves^d; and see how he sets before them the Christian union, chap. xii. of the first epistle. The Galatian churches likewise, by harkening to the judaizing teachers who wanted something added to the bare truth, that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, to make them live, or justify them; were ready to be *moved* from the truth to doubtful disputations, and, in consequence, from the law of brotherly love, to *bite and devour one another*. But the apostle, who told them, he lived *by the faith of the Son of God*, and said, *Far be it, that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, represented them as *bewitched*^e, and addressed them thus: *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you, — I stand in doubt of you*^f. So much were the apostles alarmed when they saw any thing in the churches contrary to Christ's prayer to the Father, — *That they all may be one*^g. The christian union is a striking proof of the power and truth of the gospel; and therefore Christ adds, *That the world may believe that thou hast sent me*. It is ESSENTIAL to the gospel conversation in a church of Christ, that the members *stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving TOGETHER for the faith*; — *and in nothing terrified by their adversaries*^h: and this is an evident token of their salvation. But wherever we see a church or society differently minded about the gospel and the things of it, and forbearing one another in their differences, we may with all boldness and freedom of heart pronounce them *Antichristian*, or speak of them under any name that imports an unclean corrupt

^d 1 Cor. xi. 27—30.
^e John xvii. 21.

^e Gal. v. 1.
^h Phil. i. 27, 28.

^f Gal. iv. 12—19.

society, disaffected to the gospel and the laws of the kingdom of heaven, and bearing evident marks of perdition.

All the first churches gathered by the influence of the gospel only, had among them Christ's new commandment of brotherly love, the great evidence and trial of faith unfeigned ⁱ. And all the outward expressions of brotherly love they regularly practised. They saluted one another with a kiss of charity ^k; They washed one another's feet when ever need required ^l: They also had their feasts of charity ^m or their *own supper* ⁿ, where they fed the poor brethren. And, as Jesus first made himself known to his disciples, as alive from the dead, in eating with them ^o; so they conversed freely and familiarly together, at these feasts, concerning the resurrection of Jesus and his second coming.

The apostolic churches came together every Lord's day at least, *to eat the Lord's Supper*, or *break bread*, in remembrance of Christ's death, and the promise of his *coming* from Heaven; as well as to observe the Apostle's *fellowship*, or contribution, hear their *doctrine*, and offer up *prayers—praising God*. Acts ii. 42. For they *continued stedfastly* or constantly in the observation of these things.

The churches round about us, have in their practice, mangled this order of the first churches in a most sad manner. Few, or none of them, conti-

ⁱ Tim. i. 5. John xiii. 34, 35, and chap. xiv. 21, 23, and chap. xv. 1—17. ^k Rom. xvi. 20. ^l 1 Cor. xvi. 20.

^m 2 Cor. xiii. 12. ⁿ 1 Thes. v. 26. ^o 1 Pet. v. 14. ¹ John xiii. 14, 15. ¹ Tim. v. 10. ^m Jude 12. ² Pet. ii. 13.

^a 1 Cor. xi. 21. This supper was abused in the church at Corinth, as was also the Lord's supper; but Paul did not set either supper aside, but gave direction to reform their disorders.

^o Luke xxiv. 30. 31—41, 42, 43.

nue constantly in breaking of bread, as they do in observing the Lord's Day :—many of them pay little or no regard to hearing the *Apostle's doctrine*, as it lies in their writings :—And none of them mind the *Apostle's fellowship* as sacred, or with any regularity. They have their sermons indeed constantly. But the *daily exhortations* of the first churches ^a, they find no use for, and therefore pay no respect at all to them, as far as I understand. But in the first churches the members used to *exhort one another daily*. Is it possible that any man can reverence the Apostles as divinely inspired, and yet respect these modern churches as truly christian? Far hence be the Thought!

The first churches minded the doctrine of their Lord, the head of the church, which forbid laying up treasures on earth, seeking what they should eat and drink, and wherewithal they should be clothed, like the nations of the world; and enjoined laying up treasure in heaven, by giving in alms all they had to spare, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, receiving strangers. These first churches supposed this to be pure and undefiled religion, *to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction*. And they were so simple as to believe Christ's word, had no hidden or double meaning in them: *For where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also.—Ye cannot serve God and Mammon*. But in our modern churches it can be easily explained, how a poor man in the christian profession, may swell his substance till he has goods laid up for many years, and yet have his heart all the while in heaven, and be a very respectable christian. Yea and some proceed so far as to suppose this gain godliness. What

^a Heb. x. 25.

poor short-sighted creatures were the first Christians in comparison with the modern! Indeed the gospel at first sometimes made converts of rich men (though not many such were called). These they did not require to become poor men, but CHARGED them to *be rich in good works*, and not *trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God*, the preserver of *all men*, but especially the *faithful*.

The first churches held sacred their discipline; and practised it, not according to their own wisdom, but according to the express direction delivered to them. This direction stands in 1 Cor. chap. v. and Matt. chap. xviii. According to the former of these passages, when any one of the brotherhood appeared with a wicked character, as a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, they neither gave any admonition nor exercised any forbearance, but directly put away from among themselves that wicked person. In Matt. chap. xviii. the Lord does not speak of these sort of offences, but of offences against *one another*, through *pride* and neglect of the law of brotherly love, Christ's new Commandment. When any brother offended against another in this way, the offended brother went to the other and told him his fault privately; and if he acknowledged it, it was well, and the other forgave him; if not, the offended brother took either one or two more brethren with him, and the offence was urged a second time; if the offending brother *neglected* hearing them, the offence came directly before the whole brotherhood, the church, and if he would not hear the church, he was then cut off. And what these churches did on earth was confirmed in heaven, in the *general assembly and church of the first born*.—Such were the rules and bounds of their forbearance.—In this way did the brethren in these churches

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forbear one another in love ; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Indeed the Jewish Christians kept the Law of Moses till their consciences were loosed from it by divine revelation, which came not till they received that epistle which is addressed to them, the epistle to the Hebrews, which discharged them from the Law. And the gentile Christians never came under the law, and therefore did not observe it. In this difference the Jewish and gentile Christians in the same Church were directed to forbear one another: and, doing this, they each walked according to divine revelation. Sometimes indeed, they were ready to judge one another and to impose their Faith one upon another; the Jew seeking to bring the Gentile under his Law, and the Gentile seeking to draw the Jew into his Liberty. This seems to have been the case with the Church at Rome, and therefore Paul wrote very particularly upon it. See Rom. Chap. xiv.

Every one of these first Churches, that was set in order, had its presbytery, its Bishops or pastors^r to over-see, to rule and to feed them with the word of God's grace. The modern way of *one* pastor in one Church was intirely unknown among them.

With this *Faith* and in this *Order* the first Churches of the Saints appeared in the World. The *truth* they believed, and were saved by, was the same that Jesus believed; for they had *the same spirit of Faith*, Psalm 116. 10. 2 Cor. iv. 13, 14. And believing that Jesus was the beloved Son of God, and HEARING HIM in the observation of all things, he commanded his

^r Mat. xviii. 19, 20. Acts xiv. 23. and xx. 17—28. Phil. i. 1. Tit. i. 5. 1 Pet. v. 1—4. James v. 14.

apostles to teach them, they patiently bore the reproach of the world that hated them, as it had hated Jesus before. And the world is the world still, even where it is under a form of Christianity; and the same old hatred of the *truth* and of all who are of it remains still on the earth and will do to the end. There are a few churches that have appeared, attempting to go forth by the foot-steps of the first flocks. And they find Christ's words as true now as his Disciples did at the beginning: *I have given them thy word, and the World hath hated them.* But they call to mind that the first Christians *gloried in Tribulations*, and that all Christ's followers are predestinated to a conformity^a to him in suffering, and that the suffering of this present time is not worth comparing with the glory to come. Indeed the Christian world is more inexcuseable in despising the faith and character of Christ, than were the old Jewish and Gentile Worlds.

To conclude, I see no reason to make any great account of the differences subsisting between the different Denominations of Christian professors. They might even abolish their differences without injuring the *main of Religion* in any one Denomination. But the companies that follow the Lamb that was slain to his Kingdom, must still be known by that which distinguished them from the World, when they first appeared in it: *Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the Faith of Jesus.*

4. OC 58

^a Rom. viii. 29.

F I N I S.

 E R R A T A.

In Page 7. l. 32. read *specious*. p. 16. l. 21. read *decease*.